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COVID Lockdowns Linked to Memory, Cognitive Decline: U.K. Study + More

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COVID Lockdowns Linked to Memory, Cognitive Decline: U.K. Study

The Epoch Times reported:

> The stringent lockdown measures implemented worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic have been found to significantly affect the working memory and cognitive function of older individuals, raising concerns about an elevated risk of dementia, according to a comprehensive U.K. study.
>
> Researchers in the U.K. delved into neuropsychology data from over 3,100 individuals aged 50 and above, examining cognitive health trends before and after the first two years of the pandemic. The findings, drawn from the PROTECT study, a longitudinal aging initiative conducted online by the University of Exeter and Kings College London in collaboration with the National Health Service, revealed striking impacts on the cognitive abilities of the participants.

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The study, spanning from March 1, 2019 to Feb. 28, 2022, encompassed the tumultuous period marked by the enforcement of social restrictions, including social distancing, quarantine measures, and unprecedented "full societal lockdowns," which the study noted, "had not previously been experienced in living memory."

Findings from the study showed a substantial decline in executive function, which refers to higher-level cognitive skills governing control and coordination. Alongside this, the study's cohort showed a marked decline in working memory, which is crucial for short-term memory storage and various cognitive processes.

Molly Russell's Father Calls for End to Algorithms 'Pushing Out Harmful Content' Six Years After Her Death

Sky News reported:

> Social media algorithms are still "pushing out harmful content to literally millions of young people" six years after Molly Russell's death, the schoolgirl's father has said.
>
> Ian Russell said a new report by the suicide prevention charity set up in his daughter's honor shows "a fundamental systemic failure" by tech giants "that will continue to cost young lives." Molly, who took her own life, aged 14, in November 2017 after viewing posts related to suicide, depression and anxiety online, would have been celebrating her 21st birthday this week.
>
> The Molly Rose Foundation said its new research shows the "shocking scale and prevalence" of harmful content on Instagram, TikTok and Pinterest, six years on from her death.
>
> Mr. Russell, who is chair of trustees at the Molly Rose Foundation, said: "This week when we should be celebrating Molly's 21st birthday, it's saddening to see the horrifying scale of online harm and how little has changed on social media platforms since Molly's death.
>
> "The longer tech companies fail to address the preventable harm they cause, the more inexcusable it becomes."

Misinformation Is Everywhere. Experts Offer Tools to Counter It

U.S. News & World Report reported:

> The world is being flooded with internet-driven misinformation, but there are ways to counter fake news with the facts, a new report says. These include aggressive fact-checking, preemptively debunking lies before they take root and nudging people to be more skeptical before sharing information, the American Psychological Association analysis found.
>
> The product of more than a year's work by a panel of international experts, the report explains why anyone is susceptible to misinformation if it's presented in an enticing way.
>
> People also are more likely to believe false statements if they appeal to powerful emotions like fear or outrage, or if they paint groups viewed as "others" in a negative light.
>
> And misinformation is viral — people are more likely to believe it the more it is repeated, even if it contradicts their own personal knowledge.
>
> The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention commissioned the report, which is part of a $2 million grant to develop effective counters to COVID vaccine hesitancy.

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Speaker Mike Johnson Is Reportedly Considering Slipping Controversial Warrantless Surveillance Reauthorization (FISA Section 702) Into Defense Bill

Reclaim the Net reported:

> The looming expiration of Section 702, a law enabling government agencies' ability to collect communication data from targeted foreign entities but has consistently been shown to be used against U.S. citizens, has sparked conflict between groups looking to maintain it and privacy activists who view the law as a circumvention of the Fourth Amendment's warrant requirement for searches of American citizens' communications.
>
> House Speaker Mike Johnson appears to be contemplating the inclusion of a controversial reauthorization of Section 702 into a defense appropriations bill, enabling the controversial warrantless surveillance to continue.
>
> Despite the increased pressure for the curtailing of Section 702's powers, Johnson may go forward with the measure's reauthorization via the National Defense Authorization Act.

Keeping Children Safe in a Rapidly Changing Digital Landscape

The Hill reported:

> Twenty years after starting as an intern at an organization to help create a safe media environment for children, Josh Golin is leading the group's efforts as its executive director.
>
> "When I started doing this work, we were primarily focused on things like television commercials, and junk food marketing to kids and the childhood obesity epidemic," he told The Hill in a recent interview. Those issues are still a concern, but Golin said the rise of social media was a turning point, specifically pointing to the launch of YouTube Kids in 2015.
>
> "That really precipitated a shift where we started looking at the design of platforms. And not just looking at the effects of the actual advertisements and marketing on children, but really looking at the entire ecosystem and how it was built for advertisers at children's expense as kind of being the core and key issue," Golin said.
>
> Golin said a big milestone moment was in 2019, when the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) settled with Google over illegal data collection on YouTube, triggered by a complaint the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood filed along with the Center for Digital Democracy.
>
> The settlement required Google and its subsidiary YouTube to pay $170 million to settle allegations of collecting personal information from children without their parents' consent, in violation of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). In response, YouTube also published a blog post about updates to better protect data for children's content.

Congress to Get Lesson on AI in Healthcare

Politico reported:

> Healthcare executives will praise the use of artificial intelligence in the industry before Congress today — but the hearing is unlikely to move the needle on regulation, Chelsea reports.
>
> But, the American Medical Association has tapped the brakes, recently issuing its principles for AI use in healthcare, calling for certain regulations such as reduced liability for doctors if AI leads them astray. And the hearing comes a month after the Biden administration began to prod at the issue in a broad executive order on AI, directing HHS to develop a framework for the responsible use of AI.

The hearing is the fourth this fall by the committee on AI but the first focused solely on its use in health; other hearings have explored AI in energy and telecommunications.

Why it matters: Some providers already use AI in their practices, patients aren't sure what to think about it and Congress has yet to make progress on policy around it.

How the Death of a Young Mom Led to the Unraveling of a National Fentanyl Trafficking Network

NBC News reported:

Police officers couldn't save Diamond Lynch, who overdosed in her Washington, DC, apartment after taking a pill laced with the powerful and dangerous chemical opiate. But they quickly began investigating how she died, with the help of federal prosecutors and the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Starting with some text messages and a handful of pills, authorities unraveled a massive fentanyl distribution network that extended from the D.C. area to California to Mexico. So far, 25 people have been charged. Court documents say the dealers did business largely in the open, largely on Instagram, and smuggled fentanyl-laced pills in candy boxes. The pills were made to look like Percocet and other pharmaceutical opiates.

In an investigation dubbed "Operation Blues Brothers," after the color of the deadly pills, federal agents benefitted from the carelessness of the accused drug traffickers, who communicated via social media messages that can easily be obtained with warrants. This also showed how, as Anne Milgram, head of the DEA, put it, "social media has become the superhighway of drugs."

"What we see day in and day out across the United States," she said, "is that these pills — the fentanyl that's killing Americans — are being sold on Snapchat, on TikTok, Facebook marketplace, Instagram, openly …"

Slovenia Begins Refunding Thousands of COVID Fines

Euronews reported:

The Slovenian government is repaying thousands of fines issued to citizens who broke masking and social distancing orders during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The total amount issued in COVID fines between March 2020 and May 2022 was around €5.7 million. Under legislation put forward by the country's center-left government, the €1.7 million that had actually been paid in penalties will now be refunded.

All infractions will be redacted from peoples' official records and proceedings to enforce penalties will be halted.

Among the tens of thousands expecting a refund is a delivery driver who was infamously photographed surrounded by police after lowering his mask to eat a snack while sitting outdoors well away from anyone else. The footage of the man, who was fined €400, rankled many Slovenians who considered the police's enforcement of lockdown instructions to be excessive.

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